

April 25, 2007



### [Watch the speech](#)

Mr. ALTMIRE. And I wanted to spend some time talking about what this bill actually does, because I heard some rhetoric during the debate from the other side that I couldn't believe I was hearing, because it had nothing to do with the facts of what's really in this bill. I heard Members stand up and say that the goal of the Democrats is to cut the funding for our troops and cut and run and do an immediate withdrawal. And none of that is in this bill. That is not what we voted on today.

And the great thing about democracy, the great thing about this House, the House of Representatives of the United States is that we have people who represent every side of the political spectrum. And there are a handful of Members who feel so strongly about this issue that they feel we need to immediately cut the funding and immediately withdraw our troops and bring them home. And they are very vocal. And what's interesting about that group is they didn't support this bill. The people who feel so strongly that we need to cut the funding and bring our troops home immediately voted against this bill, along with the Republicans.

So when I hear Members on the other side talk about what our goals are, and then I think of the fact that they are the ones that voted with the people who want to bring our troops home immediately and immediately cut the funding, that leads me to believe that perhaps they didn't read the bill closely enough, or maybe there's just some rhetoric that's being thrown around that they know is not true.

And what I would suggest to my colleagues, and certainly to the American people, is you look at what is in this bill. And we've talked about this before when we passed the first bill before it went to conference. We give the President more money than he asked for. The conference report that we voted today, 4 billion more dollars to go to Iraq and support our troops than President Bush asked us for. That's not cutting the funding. That is supporting our troops.

We increased funding for the Department of Defense health care facilities to make sure that situations like Walter Reed never happen again. We increased funding for the Veterans Affairs health care system to make sure that we have adequate coverage for our Nation's veterans, because, as we have talked about many times on this floor, there is no group that should stand ahead of our Nation's veterans when it comes time to make funding decisions.

And this bill, for now the fourth time in 4 months, we have voted to increase funding for the Veterans health care system, and not continue the past 6 years of chronic underfunding for the VA health care system.

And finally, this bill does, in fact, add some accountability to the process. The only remaining leverage that we have left in Iraq, almost 4 years to the day after we were told the mission was accomplished, that date was May 1, the only remaining leverage we have left is our presence there.

The gentleman from Connecticut talked about how he was in Iraq, and I don't want to put words in his mouth, but I am sure you spoke to some of the leadership over there and experienced the fact that the Iraqi government has not stepped up to manage their own affairs and administer their own government. In fact, they have failed miserably in that action, and they show no sign of being willing to step up to the plate. And the only leverage we have to make that happen, and that is the only solution to this conflict, is a political solution. There's no military solution because, it has, as you said, degenerated into a civil war. The only leverage we have there is our presence there. And until we say, loud and clear to the Iraqi government, that our presence there is not open ended, that we do consider this to be a situation that they need to

step up, administer their own affairs and run their own government, nothing's going to change. And we did have, 4 years ago today, an announcement that the mission was accomplished; and we'll be here next year and the year after and the year after, and we'll still be waiting for the Iraqi government to step up unless we take affirmative action to add some accountability, which is what we did in this bill today.

So I'm going to give it back to the gentleman so he can talk to Mr. Hodes momentarily, because I know he's chomping at the bit to say what he has to say. And I'm looking forward to hearing it myself.

But I just want to be crystal clear, this bill, in no way, represents a cut in funding for our brave men and women who are serving us in Iraq. It has more money in it for our troops, direct aid for our troops, than the President asked for. Make no mistake about that.